New Village

A Housing Cooperative of Cambodian and Laotian Refugees

CURA RESOURCE COLLECTION
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Abstract:

The residents of 2730 Portland Avenue lived in a deteriorating building that was facing condemnation by the City of Minneapolis. Large, extended families were crowded into studio and one bedroom apartments. The building had kitchens that barely functioned and appliances that were leaking gas, bathrooms with leaky and broken fixtures, inadequate hot water, and a roof that needed immediate replacement. Despite the generally unsafe and unhealthy environment, the Cambodian and Laotian refugee families who lived at 2730 Portland Avenue had formed a community of mutual support that included a network of social service organizations and volunteers who were working with them.

In 1987, Powderhorn Residents Group (PRG), a non-profit housing developer in the South Minneapolis area, had considered doing a housing project for the Southeast Asian residents but could not make the project work financially and were forced to set the project aside. Later, PRG was approached by a Legal Aid attorney and a volunteer from Grassroots Ministry, both of whom had been working with the residents, to help improve the housing situation for the residents at 2730 Portland.

What followed was a five-year collaborative process between PRG and the Refugee and Immigrants Resource Center (RIRC) (now the United Cambodian Association of Minnesota, or UCAM) to create supportive housing for the Cambodian and Laotian families living at 2730 Portland Avenue. The residents now live in a "New Village" that was designed to meet their needs and to provide them with "ownership" by operating New Village as a leasehold cooperative.

New Village is unique both in its concept and the way in which it was developed. This report describes the extensive process that was undertaken to create New Village and includes the following components:

- Background Information on Southeast Asian Refugees and Residents of 2730 Portland Avenue
- Planning Process and Project Development
- Project Concept and Design
- Collaboration of Housing and Services
- Resident Involvement
- The New Village Cooperative: Organization and Training
- Life Skills Training
- Social Services
BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Southeast Asian Refugees

Southeast Asian refugees in America are often grouped together, but in fact a variety of cultures constitute the Southeast Asian population in America. They each have different traditions and backgrounds that have shaped their American experiences. The residents at 2730 Portland Avenue were primarily Cambodian, as well as Laotian.

Cambodians are the second largest group of Southeast Asian refugees to have settled in Minnesota. Many of them are from rural areas and have little formal education. They came from refugee camps in Thailand where they were living after fleeing from the violence of the Khmer Rouge Communist government in the 1970’s. Many of them were tortured by the Khmer Rouge government and consequently suffer from psychological problems. The Cambodian-American communities are separated physically throughout the United States. Most families have relatives still living in the displaced persons’ camps in Thailand, and many of the males were killed in civil wars in Cambodia. In Minnesota, some of the refugees settled in Rochester and others in the Twin Cities. All of these factors have created very disjointed families in a culture where the clan system and the hierarchy of and respect for elders is paramount.

Laotian refugees have similar past experiences as victims of political violence and oppression, although they have different cultural backgrounds and often more education than the Cambodian refugees. Typically, they were middle to upper class city residents, who were closely aligned with the non-communist government overthrown in 1975 by the Pathet Lao.

Housing is a critical problem for both Cambodian and Laotian refugees in America. Issues of large, extended families, language barriers, discrimination, victimization by landlords, and a lack of information about legal rights plague a Southeast Asian person’s search for housing. Public housing in both Minneapolis and St. Paul is occupied by a large number of Southeast Asian families illustrating both their need for affordable housing and their desire to live as a community.

2730 Portland Avenue

The thirty-unit apartment building at 2730 Portland Avenue had long been known as housing for Cambodian and Laotian families. The Refugee and Immigrant Resource Center (RIRC) first became involved with the residents when rumors spread that the residents were causing problems at 2730 Portland. RIRC began providing services to the residents but soon discovered that the main problem at 2730 Portland was the building itself and the company that owned it.

RIRC worked with the residents on some of the issues they were facing with the landlord.
Staff worked to get the landlord to fix things that had not been fixed. They also contacted Legal Aid to represent the residents who had moved out of the building and not had their security deposits returned. Legal Aid also worked with the residents to file a tenant remedies action against the owners. It was after the residents filed their second tenant remedies action that Legal Aid approached PRG to help the residents improve their housing situation.

PROJECT CONCEPT AND DESIGN

Key Issues

- New Village was designed to fit the needs of the residents.
- New Village housing is permanent and offers support services.
- The housing was designed to enhance the culture and sense of community the residents had already established.
- Resident input enhanced the design and helped to ensure the housing would fit their needs.
- Resident input continues with the operation of New Village as a leasehold cooperative.

The Project Concept:

Powderhorn Residents Group (PRG) first considered doing a housing project for Cambodian and Laotian refugees in South Minneapolis in 1987. The concept at this time was to create transitional housing which would provide the refugees with housing and services in the transition to self-sufficiency and a permanent living situation. The project did not work financially and was set aside as PRG pursued other developments.

In 1990, PRG was approached by the Legal Aid attorney and a volunteer from Grassroots Ministry who had been working with the residents. Out of concern for the residents, they asked PRG to again explore the possibility of developing housing for the residents. At this time, PRG decided that it made the most sense to create permanent housing where the refugees would not be forced to move on and where they would have access to services indefinitely. Wanting to coordinate the project with a service provider, PRG next met with the Refugee and Immigrants Resource Center (RIRC), and the two agencies agreed to work together on the project.

The residents at 2730 Portland included a large number of children and a high percentage of female-headed households. Attention to the family was very important to them in their new country, and this was a basic value that needed to be enhanced by the new housing. Strong family and community ties are strengths of the Cambodian and Laotian cultures that PRG and RIRC wanted to utilize in the creation of New Village. RIRC describes the role of the
family as the following:

"The family is the fundamental unit of economic and social survival and the refugee family structure is the strongest resource it brings to this new culture."

(RIRC Proposal to Legal Aid for the "Cambodian Refugee Legal Services Project")

PRG and RIRC felt the housing should be based on the idea that the transition to life in America could be made easier if the family and community structure are maintained.

Building Design

It was important that the housing fit the needs of the residents and that the conceptual goals provide the basis for the building’s design. The features of New Village demonstrate this relationship between the housing and the needs and preferences of the residents.

New Village Design

- Community space for social events, programming, cooperative meetings, and other activities
- Classroom space
- Office space for RIRC (UCAM)
- Children’s play area outside
- Garden space
- Study/common area on every floor
- Kitchen features: tile flooring, a humidistat which automatically turns on an exhaust fan when humidity levels exceed normal standards which will lessen the effects of grease and odors caused by traditional cooking techniques, two-foot high table for preparing traditional food
- "Hotel doors" (double doors with locks on both sides) allow two sets of units on each floor to be used as either a 2 & 3 bedroom or a 1 & 4 bedroom combination
- Three- and four-bedroom apartments for large, extended families
- One apartment adaptable for use as a licensed child care center
- Gateway to the building’s courtyard specially carved by a Laotian craftsman

PRG and RIRC began the design process by establishing selection criteria for choosing an architectural firm. This criteria included:

- Strong rehab experience
- Good with details, follow through
- Creative, but practical
- Willing to work with residents, with the Southeast Asian culture
• Reasonable price
• Able to work with the time frame

Bowers, Bryan, and Feidt Architects were chosen for the project because they met these criteria, they had previous experience designing housing for women and children, and they had specific design ideas for the project. After selecting the architects, staff from the two agencies spent a session brainstorming ideas for the design. They next went on a site visit to a building in the Twin Cities where Cambodians enjoyed living. An additional step was to ask for input from the Wirth Company, the previous owners of the building, on what they thought should be done differently in the building. These activities raised a number of issues that PRG, RIRC, and the architects then brought to the residents.

Many of the concepts PRG and RIRC developed for 2730 Portland were culturally foreign to the residents, such as the American expectation of only two people per bedroom; education was necessary on both sides to arrive at solutions to everyday living problems. Involving the residents in the design of the building was a part of this education and helped to successfully resolve many of the design issues. The residents were asked their preferences on the following features of the building:

• One- or two-story apartments
• Open or closed kitchen, dining room, and living room
• Larger units versus a greater number of units
• Carpeting versus tile

Using the residents ideas and PRG’s experience in multi-family housing, the issues were resolved in the following way:

• One-story apartments

The two-story units presented a cultural issue because, to show proper respect to elderly family members, the elderly residents needed to be located on the top floor of the apartment. It was decided that the benefits of two-story apartments would not outweigh the problems they would cause in terms of placing residents in the correct size apartments, while respecting cultural values.

• Open kitchen, dining room, and living room

Because of odors and grease generated from traditional cooking styles, PRG, RIRC, and the residents wanted closed kitchens; however, having a large living area is also an important part of the Southeast Asian lifestyle. The final design was a compromise that included a large, open living area, and fans with special humidity controls to alleviate the cooking odors.

• A greater number of units with fewer bedrooms
Residents were worried about displacing current residents of 2730 Portland and consequently wanted more units rather than larger ones. The options were to reduce the number of apartments from thirty to eighteen or from thirty to twenty-one. The final design includes twenty-one units of the following sizes (which may vary depending on how the "hotel doors" are utilized):

1 - one bedroom apartment
7 - two bedroom apartments
11 - three bedroom apartments
2 - four bedroom apartments

- Tile in the living area, carpeting in the bedrooms

For cleaning and durability purposes, it was decided to tile the main room of the apartments but to provide an area rug for the main living area and to carpet the bedrooms. This reduces the cost of eventual carpet replacement and makes the space more flexible.

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**PLANNING AND PROJECT DEVELOPMENT**

**Key Issues**

- An Advisory Committee was formed to plan the development of New Village.
- Residents were kept informed of the process.
- Commitments were secured from city, state, federal, and private funding organizations.
- Funding for planning and initial social service expenses, in addition to capital funding, was received.
- Honeywell Corporation granted New Village a twenty-year, $1/year lease for the parking lot located next to the New Village site.

**The Advisory Committee**

The formal planning process for the 2730 Portland development was carried out by an Advisory Committee that met on a regular basis beginning in October, 1990. The Committee was originally comprised of PRG and RIRC staff but later included other organizations such as the management company, resident representatives, and the cooperative training consultant. The Committee's role evolved as the project developed and the planning needs changed. After the renovation of New Village was completed and residents returned to the building, the Advisory Committee has continued to meet to address issues involving the
operation of New Village and to keep all involved organizations communicating with each other.

The Committee originally met to develop the project concept and continued to address the elements of that conception. The planning meetings were also a forum for communication between agencies so that each organization was kept informed of the activities affecting the project. Specific issues that arose were addressed by the Committee in addition to the regular planning that was done for the components of the project design.

The first planning meeting focused on the following issues:

- Resident needs
- The planning procedure
- RIRC/PRG relationship
- Design for the building
- Social services to be provided
- The goals and assumptions of the project

These issues became more detailed as the project progressed. Committee meetings were held to plan for the resident meetings, to decide how best to communicate the plans to the residents, and how best to involve them in the planning process. The Committee also addressed the following issues of the New Village development process:

- Designing and conducting a survey of the residents
- Discussing the availability of outside services
- Discussing specific classes and training to be held
- Planning the relocation of the residents while 2730 Portland was rehabilitated
- Discussing specific rules and cleaning processes for the building
- Establishing selection criteria for the architectural firm

**Fundraising**

Fundraising for the project was the responsibility of PRG's Executive Director, who then gave regular updates to Advisory Committee members. The New Village project initially required extensive planning to coordinate housing and services, to establish the cooperative, to understand the cultural issues of the residents, and to translate the plans to the residents. While project development fees usually pay for the planning costs, this amount was not enough and was not received early enough to pay for the staff time required by both PRG and RIRC to plan New Village. It was important to the success of New Village that RIRC be involved in the planning process and have funds to pay for staff involvement. Also, it was, and continues to be important that social services be provided at New Village, and that funding be available to pay for the services.

The initial funding for the project came in the Fall of 1990 from the United Way's Housing
Initiative Fund. This early grant paid for necessary staff time from both PRG and RIRC to plan and develop the project. The grant was renewed in 1991 and 1992 and has helped New Village cover staff and service costs. Other important planning and services grants were received from the Williams Steel & Hardware Foundation and the Emma B. Howe Foundation.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planning and Social Services Funding Sources</th>
<th>Grant Amount</th>
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<tr>
<td>Emma B. Howe Foundation</td>
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<td>United Way - Housing Initiative Fund 1990</td>
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<tr>
<td>Williams Steel and Hardware Foundation</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>$61,000</strong></td>
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The first source of capital funding received for New Village was the Affordable Housing Grant, a relatively new Federal Home Loan Bank Board program. The rest of the capital financing was secured by the summer of 1991. Other capital funding was received through housing tax credits, which were purchased by the National Equity Fund, and from the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency’s Housing Trust Fund.

A large portion of the capital funding came from the City’s Multi-family, Community Development Block Grant Program. Significant competition for these funds made it necessary for the project to be considered a city priority for funding. New Village was received funding after PRG’s second application thanks to growing support from the community and City Council members. A Family Housing Fund grant was awarded when the City CDBG funding was granted.

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<tr>
<th>Capital Funding Sources</th>
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<td>National Equity Fund - Housing Tax Credits</td>
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<td>Minneapolis Community Development Agency - Community Development Block Grant Multi-Family Housing Program</td>
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<td>Minneapolis/St. Paul Family Housing Fund</td>
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<td>Minnesota Housing Finance Agency - Housing Trust Fund</td>
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<td>Federal Home Loan Bank Board - Affordable Housing Initiative</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
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Earlier in the process, PRG had explored funding from the Minnesota Department of Human Services for the refugee services component of the project. PRG decided not to pursue this source, because there is only a small amount of funding available for refugee services and the funds are typically awarded to traditional self-sufficiency programs or to extraordinary projects.

Another key source of funding came after New Village was completed. PRG received a three-year grant from the McKnight Foundation’s Enhanced Housing Program for working with all of PRG’s housing cooperatives. This funding will cover part of the support staff salaries for New Village during the first three years as it sets up the structure to provide self-sufficiency to the residents through support services and the leasehold cooperative.

Also key to the success of the project was securing use of the parking lot located next to the building. The parking lot was vital to the project’s success for two reasons. First, the residents needed the parking spaces the lot would provide because there is minimal on-street parking near the building and no off-street parking on the 2730 Portland lot. Second, the addition of the parking lot would allow for green space and a play area for the children in the back of the building. It is PRG’s policy, as well as the Minneapolis Community Development Agency’s, to develop housing that includes adequate outdoor play space for children.

The parking lot is owned by the Honeywell Corporation, whose headquarters are located next to the 2730 Portland location. Although the parking lot was unused by Honeywell, they were reluctant to sell or lease the property, not knowing what future needs they might have for it. Also, they were skeptical that the project would actually happen and that it would be the quality project that PRG was promising.

The fundraising and development process for 2730 Portland continued even though PRG had not gained Honeywell’s commitment. PRG found they had to define the project as something that was in the corporation’s best interest, in terms of being part of a positive project in the neighborhood. It was also important to demonstrate that the project would work. By the summer of 1991, PRG had obtained all the necessary capital funding for the project, which demonstrated that New Village had gained the support of city, state, federal and private funders. In view of this, Honeywell agreed to lease the parking lot to New Village for one dollar a year for twenty years.

Although McKnight and United Way funding has enabled PRG to pay for initial staff costs, there is a need for funding for the long-term to cover staff expenses for New Village. There is no amortizing mortgage on the property at 2730 Portland, so the costs of the building are paid out of the rents. The rents are very low, and although this provides affordable housing for the residents, it does not provide enough built-in funding for staff costs. It was initially thought that some costs could be covered by the project budget, but unexpectedly high utility costs have negated this possibility. PRG’s goal is to cover the staffing costs by doing additional fundraising in order to avoid raising rents.
COLLABORATION OF HOUSING AND SERVICES

Key Issues

- The roles are based on each organization's strengths; PRG provides housing, RIRC provides services.
- An agreement was developed between PRG and RIRC that established each organization's roles in the development of New Village.

When PRG first considered the project in 1987, the American Refugee Committee (ARC) had expressed an interest in working on the project. In 1989, PRG met with Ann Damen, head of Refugee Services at the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS), to discuss what housing and services were available for Southeast Asian refugees in the Twin Cities and what organizations were providing services. Damen suggested that PRG contact the Refugee and Immigrant Resource Association (RIRC).

RIRC is a Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association that is operated by Americans with Cambodian backgrounds, for Cambodian refugees and immigrants. RIRC had been providing services to the residents at 2730 Portland, and it was logical for PRG to contact RIRC as a potential partner in the development of supportive housing. The high service needs of the residents necessitated the availability of services to the residents; PRG felt the most successful project would combine housing and services, with each provided by an agency experienced in each role.

In 1990, the two agencies began discussing the possibility of working together on the project. Later in the year they developed an agreement that established the roles of each agency in the project. It was necessary to combine the different perspectives and strengths of the two agencies for the New Village project and to compromise on issues in order to develop a comprehensive project. The agreement focused on these strengths and perspectives in defining the project roles.

RIRC Strengths:

- Connections and experience with the Southeast Asian population
- Experienced service designer and provider
- Previous relationship with the residents of 2730 Portland
- Translation skills, both verbal and cultural
- Philosophy of self-sufficiency and practice in it
- Legitimacy as a service provider able to meet the refugees' needs
- A broad perspective of providing comprehensive services to meet all of a person's needs
PRG Strengths:

- Experienced housing developer
- Access to funding sources
- Connections to the neighborhood and the City Council
- Non-profit ownership
- Experience with architects and contractors
- Staff time for development of the project
- Experience in training and working with resident management

Based on these strengths, PRG is the owner of the building and took the lead in planning and developing the project. RIRC's role was twofold. First, they were a participant in the planning and development process and provided input on project decisions. Second, they provided consultation for and project management of the relationship with the residents. This part included the provision of training, social service management, and translation services.

The project management role was filled in large part by RIRC's New Village Liaison who is now the Housing Coordinator at New Village, employed by PRG. Other elements of the agreement established the amount of funding PRG would provide for RIRC's services and the provision of free office and community space for RIRC in New Village.

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RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT

Key Issues

- It was necessary to establish and maintain the residents' trust.
- Communicating and translating the plans for New Village to the residents was an important and time-consuming step.
- A New Village Liaison from RIRC served as a bridge between the residents and PRG.
- The development process utilized resident input.
- The Committee had to temporarily relocate residents during construction without damaging the residents' community.

The Issue of Trust:

Gaining the residents' trust was a vital part of the process that was made more difficult because of language and cultural barriers. It was necessary for PRG to convince the residents that PRG was trying to help them. This situation made it important for PRG to clearly communicate the project goals, plans, and progress to the residents as the
development progressed.

The issues of trust and miscommunication first surfaced when PRG raised the idea of forming a "cooperative" and holding a lot of "meetings" with the residents to plan for the cooperative. In Communist Cambodia, "cooperatives" were established to promote the economic good of everyone. They were in fact used by the government to gain total control over the country and the people. "Meetings" were held to propagate the party agenda and to quell dissension by shooting anyone who rebelled against the government.

The New Village Liaison discussed PRG's plans with the residents and attempted to explain that this cooperative and these meetings did not mean the same thing as they did in Cambodia. Understandably, the residents' initial response was suspicion towards PRG and skepticism about the organization's idea. Although the residents did not believe PRG was going to shoot them, they did worry that PRG wanted to control them.

The issue of trust was exacerbated by the confusion of the residents' current situation. They were in the midst of working with Legal Aid on a lawsuit against their current landlord, the Wirth Company. It was difficult to communicate to the residents that the people at PRG were different; they were not "slum" landlords, they were not trying to make money by taking advantage of the residents, but rather, they were trying to help.

The New Village Liaison was an important part of the process to gain the residents' trust because they trusted him. He served as a bridge between the residents and PRG and worked to convince the people to support the New Village project. He also worked hard to encourage the residents' input into the development of New Village.

**Resident Meetings:**

Because residents were skeptical that PRG would be able to fulfill what they were promising, many of the steps the Advisory Committee took were to first establish and then sustain the residents' confidence. One of these steps was to involve the input of the residents in the project development process. This involvement took the form of resident representation at the Advisory Committee meetings and through regular resident meetings.

At the first residents' meeting in 1991, three representatives were chosen to provide resident input at the planning meetings. Two Cambodian and one Laotian resident were selected to represent the residents at every other Advisory Committee meeting. The resident meetings served three important purposes. The first was to listen to the concerns of the residents and encourage them to contribute their ideas to New Village. The second purpose was to communicate the project plans to the residents, and the third was to discuss and resolve issues regarding the building and the development process.

The language and cultural barriers between PRG and the residents required careful translation of the project plans. Most residents did and many still do not speak English, which often
caused confusion about the project plans, even after translation. During Resident Meetings, information was often redefined by interpreters several times. The RIRC Liaison provided Cambodian translation for much of the information and another translator was hired to translate into Lao. A lot of time was spent carefully planning what would be said at Resident Meetings and translating that information into both Cambodian and Lao.

The main issues discussed with the residents at the resident meetings were:

- The overall plans for 2730 Portland
- The idea of operating the building as a cooperative
- Living skills issues that included taking responsibility for the conditions in the building
- Temporary relocation while the building was rehabilitated

The meetings also provided the Advisory Committee with the opportunity to address rumors and other problems. For instance, after the Committee began discussing the type of security system to put into the building, rumors began circulating that PRG was going to make the residents wear cards around their necks if they wanted to leave and enter the new building. What the Committee had talked about was installing a security card system at the building entrance; what the residents feared was that PRG was trying to control them.

The detrimental effect of rumors led the Committee and the residents to discuss the development of a grievance procedure, so that if PRG, RIRC, or the Management Company made a rule or did something the residents felt was unfair, a procedure existed for airing the issue and correcting it. The rumors resulted in the opportunity to increase the residents’ ability to begin taking control over their situation.

To reinforce what was discussed in the meetings and to reach those residents who did not attend meetings, the Committee created a New Village newsletter. Through the newsletter, the Committee was able to express the project goals, expectations for the residents, meeting times, and other important information about the development of New Village.

**Relocation:**

PRG originally considered purchasing two buildings on Portland Avenue so that residents could be shifted between the two buildings while rehabilitation was done, and so that more housing would be made available. Purchasing a second building was eventually considered unworkable, and instead it was necessary to temporarily relocate the residents in market housing while 2730 Portland was rehabilitated.

Because the temporary relocation would be a complicated process, PRG did not want to relocate any more new residents than was necessary. For a time before PRG purchased the building at the end of 1991, PRG shared the vacancy risk with the landlord so they would not re-rent units as people moved out of the building. At the time of relocation in the spring
of 1992, fifteen families remained in the building.

The relocation process was planned by the Advisory Committee and carried out by the RIRC Liaison, PRG staff, and the Management Company hired to do the property management for New Village. There were two key parts of the relocation process. First, it was critical that PRG communicate to the residents that the relocation move was temporary and they would be moving back to a "New Village." Second, it was important not to destroy the community in the process of relocation.

Many of the residents wanted to remain a community during the relocation process. This required a building with enough vacant units to accommodate a large number of families, which severely limited the available options. The difficulty of the search was worsened by the discrimination the residents encountered while seeking temporary apartments. The New Village Liaison explored different options and eventually found a building on Nicollet Avenue where all the families that wanted to could move together.

Prior to physically moving the residents, it was necessary to communicate the process to the residents and to verify the residents' incomes. The second step was required to determine if the family qualified to return to New Village and to determine their ability to pay rent in a temporary residence. Incomes were verified through surveys that were taken in personal interviews with each of the families. The surveys were also used to determine family size and discover any needs and concerns the family might have had about the process and the future New Village. Rents were supplemented for those unable to pay the difference between rent at 2730 Portland and the temporary residence. Federal relocation requirements dictated that PRG pay the difference between the new rent and 30% of the family's income or the rent level the family paid at 2730 Portland Avenue.

One of the problems encountered with the relocation process was that some residents would not be able to return to New Village after it was completed because of the income requirements. Although resident incomes were screened through surveys both early and in the middle of the development process, resident estimates of the income of all family members was often low. In a few cases this did not allow the extended family to live in one unit, and one family was unable to return because they were earning too much to qualify for New Village. PRG provided this family with relocation assistance and helped them to purchase a home under a PRG homeownership program. Two other individuals chose not to move into one-bedroom apartments at New Village and were given assistance to move to other, smaller apartments.

After the residents moved out of 2730 Portland, regular visits were made to the construction site to reassure the residents that New Village was becoming a reality and that they were in a temporary situation. The Advisory Committee and the New Village Liaison also continued to hold resident meetings and training at the temporary location on Nicollet Avenue, and the New Village Liaison kept in close contact with residents.
An additional problem was encountered when the residents left the temporary residence on Nicollet Avenue to return to New Village. The landlord at the Nicollet apartments withheld some of the residents' security deposits, and they were forced to turn to Legal Aid to get the deposits returned and be able to pay the security deposit at New Village.

NEW VILLAGE COOPERATIVE: ORGANIZATION AND TRAINING

Key Issues

- New Village operates as a leasehold cooperative.
- To establish the cooperative, PRG had to overcome certain assumptions about gender roles and other cultural issues.
- The cooperative structure and training was adapted to fit resident needs and abilities.
- Informal training was also conducted as various situations presented opportunities for cooperative skill development.

The Leasehold Cooperative

All of PRG's multi-family housing developments are operated as leasehold cooperatives in which PRG owns and develops the property, but the residents have input into how the building is operated. The structure of a leasehold cooperative permits the apartment building to be taxed as a homestead property at lower rates. This, and the resident participation feature, enables the cooperative to have minimal rent increases.

In a leasehold cooperative, the owner leases the building to the cooperative, which is made up of building tenants. The tenants then purchase a membership and lease their space from the cooperative. The cooperative establishes a Board which takes the lead in making decisions on issues that affect the management and rent levels of the co-op. Committees are also formed to handle different building and co-op issues. The committees are typically based on the following issues:

- Finance
- Maintenance
- Member selection
- House rules and policies
- Social programs and activities

The New Village Cooperative

The Advisory Committee wanted to establish some form of resident ownership and
participation at New Village but was initially uncertain what form it would take. Because of language barriers, the residents’ higher needs, and their lack of experience in participatory democracy, the Committee anticipated that New Village would operate as a modified leasehold cooperative and would need more time to develop the skills necessary to operate as a full cooperative. The Committee also expected that several adjustments in the training process would be necessary to accommodate the residents’ unique situation.

Several assumptions that PRG normally operated from when developing a cooperative were tested by the development of the New Village cooperative. One of these assumptions was that of gender roles in the cooperative. Traditionally, PRG encourages everyone to participate in the cooperative and discourages participation based on traditional gender roles. PRG discovered, however, that the female residents at New Village were participating but the men really were not. PRG was forced to adjust its perceptions about gender roles and actively recruit men to fill more traditional roles, such as serving on the parking and maintenance committee.

An additional concern that had to be addressed in the cooperative training was the potential for a "Royal Family" to develop. It is typical in the Southeast Asian culture that one family in a community will take control and "rule" over the others. This had happened at 2730 Portland, but it was not something that would work at New Village if a democratically-based cooperative was going to be established. This also led to the decision that the site manager chosen for the building would not live at New Village for fear that they would exert too much control over the residents.

The Committee discovered during the course of the project’s development that the youth often spoke better English than their parents and understood more readily what the Committee was trying to communicate. The Committee explored the idea of involving the youth in the cooperative, to take advantage of their better grasp of the language. This raised a cultural issue of respect for elders, which caused the Committee to proceed cautiously in giving power to the younger members without interfering with cultural values.

**Cooperative Training**

Typically, when PRG establishes a cooperative, residents are selected and then training begins. However, in the case of New Village, many of the residents who would form the co-op were already in place, so some pre-training was necessary to introduce the idea of the cooperative and to begin training the residents in the participatory process. There were also a number of informal training opportunities that arose to introduce and reinforce the participatory concepts of the cooperative.

The cooperative training was conducted through a consultant who first worked with the Advisory Committee to establish the process that would be undertaken. Second, the consultant conducted much of the initial training and then began teaching the New Village Housing Coordinator how to do the training so it would not have to be done in English and
then translated. While PRG normally hires a cooperative trainer for its developments, the trainer’s role is not usually as extensive as it was for New Village. PRG also employs a coop support person who provides assistance to all of PRG’s co-ops after the residents have gone through the training process. This role was adjusted to fit the needs of New Village by having her involved earlier in the process.

In the summer of 1992, the residents established committees, and representatives were chosen to serve on the committees. The original committees were based on resident issues and concerns and included Parking and Maintenance, Building Concerns, and Membership. Also, the cooperative trainer explained to the residents about the bylaws that were part of the cooperative’s documents and the rules that the committees would be establishing.

After the membership committee was formed they began creating the membership selection criteria to fill openings. Residents from 2730 Portland would only fill sixteen of the New Village apartments, so an additional five apartments needed to be filled with residents who were accepted into the cooperative. To develop this criteria, the cooperative trainer and PRG staff first held a meeting with the residents and asked them what kind of neighbors they wanted to have at New Village. These wants were turned into criteria based on the criteria of another PRG cooperative. There was no need to actively market New Village because a substantial waiting list already existed for the building; the building was well-known among the refugee committee.

The Advisory Committee wanted to ensure that New Village would maintain the community that existed among the residents of 2730 Portland. To do this, the residents living at 2730 Portland at the time of rehabilitation were given first priority for returning to New Village. Those residents who had lived at 2730 Portland previously, but had moved before the rehabilitation process began, were also given priority for living at New Village. Many of these residents had been forced to move for health and safety reasons; the Advisory Committee felt it was necessary to allow them the opportunity to return to the building.

After the selection criteria was established, the Management Company gave the Membership Committee a list of people who qualified financially to live at New Village. The Committee then interviewed the prospects and gave their approval, based on the criteria they had developed. At this stage, the Committee’s role was mainly a formality, but the process will continue to evolve as the Committee assumes more responsibility for the process. Currently, New Village is a community of Cambodian and Laotian refugee families. The Committee anticipates the community will gradually become more diverse to reflect the overall diversity of the surrounding neighborhood; they expect this will be a positive development for the cooperative.

Informal training opportunities often arose during different phases of the development. When the Committee began planning for the New Village Open House they wanted one of the residents to speak and represent the residents’ perspective. The Committee decided this was an opportunity to reinforce the concept of voting by having the residents vote on who
they wanted to speak for them. Ballots were drawn up, nominations made, and a vote was taken.

After the residents moved into New Village, a more in-depth cooperative training was carried out. This began in December, 1992, with electing a Board and establishing an additional committee. In 1993, the formal training has continued as residents learn to run meetings, give reports, and deal with the various co-op issues. While the cooperative training and communication process was time consuming, the New Village residents soon became very motivated and involved in the New Village cooperative, and they assumed responsibility sooner than the Committee had anticipated.

LIFE SKILLS TRAINING

Key Issues

♦ Early in the development process, cleaning standards had to be established and care of the building reinforced.
♦ Building issues were resolved with resident input which was part of the informal cooperative training process.

There were several issues regarding the living conditions at 2730 Portland that the Advisory Committee felt were important to be addressed at the beginning of the development process. These issues included cleaning habits, treatment of community living spaces, and supervision of children. PRG discovered that it is not uncommon for some of the traditional living habits in parts of Southeast Asia to create health problems and/or to be unacceptable in America. It was important to emphasize to the residents why certain habits were necessary for the success of New Village and why education was going to be necessary to help the residents care for their new environment.

It was also important that the life skills training component of New Village begin well before the rehabilitation of 2730 Portland was completed. Although the building at 2730 Portland was going to be completely rehabilitated, part of the training process for the residents was to begin practicing good cleaning habits. The Committee began the training by first establishing goals and identifying the areas on which to focus the training efforts. Training was carried out through classes conducted by the New Village Liaison and other RIRC staff and through the use of a video tape from the St. Paul Public Housing Authority on how to do certain household cleaning.

Another step of the training was to discuss building issues with the residents and plan how to resolve them. Problems of trash in the hallways and children playing and running in the halls were disruptive to the community, and different ways of dealing with these issues were
discussed with the residents. Several residents were concerned about the children playing and running in the halls at all times of the day and night. The Committee recognized this as a potential area both to provide services in terms of parenting and child care, and also to develop resident decision making skills. The Committee held a meeting with the residents about the issue and asked for their input on what to do about the problem. An article was published in the newsletter that asked the residents to vote on what hours children should be allowed to play in the halls. A system was then established in which residents on each floor would take turns monitoring the halls. Also, structured activities were established for the children, and a play area was developed outside of the building. One of the co-op committees was also set up to deal these types of building issues on a regular basis.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Key Issues

- Services are an important part of the New Village concept, and are necessary for resident self-sufficiency.
- The concept of self-sufficiency was adapted to refugees with multiple needs and barriers.

The residents at New Village face a number of obstacles to self-sufficiency, some of which are characteristic of other impoverished groups, and some of which are unique to their population. Key to the project concept and the needs of the residents is the provision of ongoing social services to help the residents succeed in overcoming the barriers they face.

A typical self-sufficiency program philosophy encourages people to become self-sufficient by having them do things for themselves. This philosophy had to be adjusted somewhat for the New Village residents because of the greater barriers they face. This perspective developed out of RRC's experience working with Cambodian refugees and witnessing the amount of services and help the people need. The project became a compromise between traditional self-sufficiency expectations and the perspective that the refugees face significant barriers.

In 1991, the Advisory Committee began discussing the services that would be provided after New Village was completed. They discussed the goals they had for the social services component and identified several initial areas for services including child care, parenting, housekeeping, and generation gaps. An intern was hired to first survey the residents regarding what services they felt they needed and could benefit from. Second, the intern explored the various services available in the community. The Advisory Committee then established goals for service provision based on the people's needs. Also, as described previously, several issues arose in the building that suggested possible ongoing service needs.
In the area of child care, it was decided to make one of the apartments suitable for a licensed child care center if the residents decided to move in the direction of formal child care. Currently, RIRC has encouraged residents to learn to do child care for other residents without the formal component of a licensed facility. Other services currently provided at New Village are ESL training, nutrition classes, and health care services.

Some additional issues have arisen regarding services as New Village has moved further into the implementation stage. One of these issues includes the need to organize the provision of services by organizations, both RIRC (UCAM) and outside providers, and by volunteers. The Advisory Committee is exploring the idea of having a services coordinator position for New Village that would be supervised by RIRC.
APPENDIX A
Timeline for the New Village Development

1987
- PRG considers housing for Southeast Asian Refugees
- Concept: transitional housing
- Problems with the project financially

1988
- 2730 Portland Avenue sold to Wirth Co.

1989
- PRG met with Ann Damen from DHS
- Damen recommends RIRC
- Considers other sites

1990
- PRG contacted by Legal Aid, volunteer
- Summer: met with RIRC Board of Directors
- Applied for United Way planning funding

1991
- Began serious funding search
- Fall: received United Way grant
- October: began Advisory Committee planning meetings
- Targeted 1991 for construction

1992
- March: residents relocated
- March to September: construction
- Summer: began co-op pretraining, established membership criteria
- September: New Village completed, residents return
- December: formal co-op training begins with election of co-op Board

1993
- Social services/training begins
- Co-op training continues
APPENDIX B

The Actors Involved in the New Village Development

**Powderhorn Residents Group, Incorporated (PRG):** non-profit housing developer

Janet Laskey - Executive Director  
Sherree Strickland - Cooperative Liaison  
Michele Wiegand - Construction Manager  
Deborah Freedman - Housing Assistant  
Debra Palmquist - Financial Manager  
Chantha Koy - New Village Housing Coordinator (1993)

**Refugee and Immigrant Resource Center (RIRC):** Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association providing services to Cambodian refugees. Now the United Cambodian Association of Minnesota (UCAM)

Mengkruy Ung - Original Executive Director  
Lar Munstock - Executive Director, Advisory Committee Member  
Noriyas Un - RIRC Board Member, Advisory Committee Member  
Win Terrell - RIRC Board Member, Advisory Committee Member  
Chantha Koy - New Village Liaison (until 1993)

**The New Village Cooperative:** The residents of 2730 Portland Avenue

**Gavzy & Gavzy:** Property Management Company  
Catherine Gavzy - New Village Manager

**Meridian Housing and Training Associates:** originally Broen & Pope Housing Consultants  
Julie Conway - Co-op Trainer

**Legal Aid:** Phil Grove

**Grassroots Ministry:** Margo Rose

**Laotian Translator:** Keo Detvongsai

**New Village Site Manager:** Bunchoen Han

**CURA Intern:** Kiyoshi Nakasaka
APPENDIX C

New Village Resident Selection Criteria

New Village Cooperative is a 21-unit development located in one building. Due to the nature of the development and the fact that it is a cooperative, residents must be able to live well together and be willing to perform their share of the work of the cooperative. Therefore, the following requirements must be placed on prospective members.

Income Guidelines:

Due to the funding of this project the maximum allowed income during the initial rent up is $15,300 per household.

Family Size Guidelines:

In order to provide comfortable and affordable housing, the following are the minimum and maximum family size guidelines:

One Bedroom

Minimum
1 adult

Maximum
2 adults
or
1 adult (parent) and 1 child of the opposite sex under age 7
or
1 adult and 1 child of the same sex

Two Bedroom

Minimum
1 adult and 1 child

or
2 adults not a couple

Maximum
Each bedroom may have any of the following:
2 adults (sharing 1 bedroom)
2 persons of the same sex
1 adult (parent) and 1 child of the opposite sex under age 7*
2 children of the opposite sex under 13**

Three Bedroom

Minimum
1 adult and 2 children of the opposite sex
or
2 adults not a couple and 1 child

Maximum
Each bedroom may have any of the following:
2 adults (sharing 1 bedroom)
2 persons of the same sex
1 adult (parent) and 1 child of the opposite sex under age 7*
2 children of the opposite sex under 13**

Four Bedroom

Minimum
1 adult and 4 children, one of which is of the opposite sex
or
2 adults not sharing a bedroom and two children of the opposite sex

Maximum
Each bedroom may have any of the following:
2 adults (sharing 1 bedroom)
2 persons of the same sex
1 adult (parent) and 1 child of the opposite sex under age 7*
2 children of the opposite sex under 13**

* A parent may sign a waiver choosing to share a bedroom with a child under age seven.

** Parents may sign a waiver choosing to allow children of the opposite sex to share a room up to age thirteen.
APPENDIX D

Draft Agreement between Refugee and Immigrant Resource Center and Powderhorn Residents Group, Inc.

Refugee and Immigrant Resource Center (RIRC) and Powderhorn Residents Group, Inc. (PRG) agree that RIRC is a sponsor of the Refugee Housing Project at 2730 Portland Avenue. This means that RIRC is involved in all aspects of the planning process.

Preliminary Development Activities:

Site Selection: PRG leads. RIRC agreement to any additional site for relocation.

Preparation of Agreement between Partners: Consensus.

Community Relations: PRG leads. RIRC part of major community (neighborhood) meetings and meetings with City Council members, funders, etc. Larger planning meetings will include RIRC and neighborhood organization(s).

Building Meetings: RIRC leads. RIRC will call meetings as needed and at times of mutual agreement, organize resident participation, lead in preparing agenda and information, facilitate input from residents.

Resident Survey: PRG/RIRC. RIRC to approve and assist with preparation of survey. RIRC to conduct survey among residents.

Resident Relations: RIRC lead. RIRC to direct and facilitate involvement of residents in planning process.

"Market Research": PRG lead. RIRC to assist with collecting information on future potential residents and "clients" of the project.

Conceptual Plan: Consensus. RIRC and PRG to work together and agree upon the concepts and planning for the building and project.

Architectural Selection: PRG lead. RIRC and PRG agree upon the architect.

Site Planning: PRG lead. RIRC and PRG to agree upon the site plans, including resident input.

Resident planning input: PRG lead. RIRC to work with PRG to facilitate resident input into the plans; including interior and exterior.

Schematic design: PRG lead. RIRC to agree to the major aspects of the schematic design, including room layouts, design details etc. RIRC to participate in initial team meetings.

MCDA/Funding approval: PRG lead. RIRC to participate and assist with fundraising
approvals, especially with the MCDA and City Council.

Operating budget: PRG lead. RIRC review and input into annual operating budget, soft costs.

Relocation plan: PRG/RIRC. Joint planning of all major aspects including decisions.

Relocation assistance: PRG/RIRC. RIRC working with individual residents and families for temporary and permanent relocation.

Resident training: PRG/RIRC. RIRC working with individual residents and families for temporary and permanent relocation.

Resident Relations: PRG/RIRC. RIRC assist with ongoing relations moving residents, getting set up in new housing, etc.

RIRC’s services are categorized in two ways:

A. Participation in planning, fundraising, and strategies for the housing project.
B. Consultation and project management of resident relations, relocation, training and social service management, including translation services.

A. Participation in planning, fundraising, and strategies for the housing project:

1. Participation in planning meetings at least monthly to develop plans and concepts for the project.
2. Participation in funding meetings
3. Review of plans and concepts for input
4. Review of final plans for approval, including:
   - Site selection
   - Architectural selection
   - Site Planning
   - Schematic Design
   - Operating Budget
   - Relocation Plan
   - Housing Management Plan

B. Consultation and project management of resident relations, relocation, training and social service management, including translation services:
1. Building meetings: call meeting as needed and agreed, organize resident participation, lead in preparing agenda and information, facilitate input from residents, translation services.

2. Resident Survey: RIRC approve survey and conduct the survey among residents. RIRC staff provide follow up for additional information if needed.

3. "Market Research": RIRC to assist with collecting information on potential residents,
ie. what is the status of refugee immigration, who is expected to need housing, what income sources are available to residents.

4. Resident Planning input: RIRC to help facilitate resident input through meetings coordination, forwarding ongoing information from residents and communicate with residents about progress of the project.

5. Relocation plan: RIRC to provide information for preparation of a relocation plan, including resident information, current appropriate housing resources, etc.

6. Relocation assistance: RIRC to provide individual assistance to families through providing information, receiving information, communicating appropriate steps, translation, assisting with temporary and permanent moving, and addressing related needs of the residents.

7. Resident training: RIRC to help design appropriate training for living in new housing, help develop appropriate management system for the building and training. (Training services provided directly through current programs of RIRC or contracted separately).

8. Resident Relations: Generally communicate with residents throughout process, advise on appropriate actions and approach to resident involvement, and assist residents throughout process of transition.

Payment for the above services will be as follows:

1. Overhead for RIRC staff time prior to securing total development proceeds (estimated by July 1, 1991). Payment will be for services under part B above, and for staff time, not including executive director, to attend monthly meetings and funding meetings. Billed at an hourly rate of $13.50. Not to exceed 20% of foundation funding received. PRG agrees to estimate the monthly work to be provided starting April 1, 1991, to provide continuity for staff.

2. Overhead for services provided in part B, above, plus staff time, including executive director, for services in part A, following commitment of total development proceeds and prior to the initial financial closing of the project.

   The hourly rate for all staff will be billed at $20.00/hour. The amount required for the project in part B will be estimated initially and paid monthly, provided that RIRC will provide reports which reasonably agree with the estimated monthly amounts. Such amounts may be adjusted by mutual agreement. The limitation on this amount will be 50% of the non-profit administrative fee received by PRG for the project.

3. Overhead for services provided in part B, above, plus staff time, including executive director, for services in part A, following initial financial closing of the project and up to the move-in and final financial closing of the project.
The hourly rate for all staff will be billed at $20/hour. The amount required for the project will be estimated initially. The payments for this overhead work, however, will be as follows:

- First draw: Repayment of additional amounts due under Sections 1 and 2 above, plus hourly billing to date.
- Sixth construction draw: Hourly billing to date.
- Final closing and permanent mortgage closing: Hourly billing to date, plus an amount estimated to be the value of volunteer hours put into the project since its inception, times $20/hour, up to 20% of the project overhead.

4. Fee for sponsorship. 20% of the Project Development fee. To be paid when PRG is able to receive its fee, after closing of tax credit syndication.

The intention in this project is that the building design will provide free office and community space, including a classroom, for social service organizations working with the residents. RIRC will receive free use of this space in the project after completion and agrees that it intends to continue to work with the residents, as long as Cambodians are among the residents, in cooperation with overall management of the project. RIRC may also develop plans and provide social services to the residents during this housing development process and within its own programs.